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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 004545

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MTS, INR/EAP, DRL/CRA, G/TIP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: MALACANANG REPORTEDLY CONSIDERING PARDON OF
CONVICTED CHILD RAPIST FROM PROMINENT POLITICAL CLAN

REF: A. MANILA 4140

[1](#)B. MANILA 0219

Classified By: Acting Pol/C Joseph L. Novak for Reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Palace is reportedly considering pardoning former Congressman Romeo Jalosjos, who has been in jail since 1997 for raping an 11 year old girl. According to opponents of the possible move, the Palace is considering the matter as a reward to the Jalosjos clan, which is politically influential in Mindanao. The Palace has neither confirmed nor denied the reports that it is considering a pardon, although the Justice Secretary has spoken equivocally on the matter. The notion that the Palace might even be contemplating a pardon tends to highlight President Arroyo's continued insecurity over her political position. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Pressing for a Pardon: Malacanang Palace is reportedly considering pardoning former Congressman Romeo Jalosjos, who has been in jail since 1997 for raping an 11 year old girl (see background re Jalosjos and his case below; also see ref b). His brother, Cesar Jalosjos, and sister, Cecilia Jalosjos Carreon, who are both representatives in the House from Zamboanga del Norte Province in Mindanao, have been pressing the issue and urging an immediate pardon for Jalosjos based on medical grounds (they say he has heart problems). Jalosjos' mother, Angelina, has also been making emotional public appeals to President Arroyo asking that she use her powers to pardon her son. A petition requesting his pardon that had gained the signatures of over 50 House members as of late last year is being revived and circulated in the House in a bid to get further endorsements. Secretary of Justice Raul Gonzales, when asked about the case by the press, has given equivocal statements indicating that he might consider recommending that a pardon be issued on medical grounds.

[1](#)3. (C) Claims of "Payback": Opposition politicians, figures in the Catholic Church, and NGOs working in the anti-trafficking area have bitterly criticized the effort to pardon Jalosjos. They assert that he does not merit a pardon given the seriousness of his crime, adding that his claimed medical condition is nothing but a ruse. The criticism from these sectors also involves claims that Malacanang may grant the pardon as a way "to pay back" the Jalosjos clan for its political support. Ronnie Zamora, an Opposition Congressman, told Acting Pol/C on September 23 that he believed that Malacanang might want to grant the pardon because Cesar Jalosjos and Cecilia Jalosjos Carreon had supported the President by voting against the Opposition's impeachment complaint earlier this month (ref a). Zamora added: "The Jalosjos clan is very important in the House and in the Zamboanga area, and Arroyo needs its continued support." Zamora added that Malacanang might be reluctant to grant the pardon because "there will be hell to pay if it does -- Romeo Jalosjos is known to be a bad character."

[1](#)4. (C) No Clear Signals from the Palace: Malacanang has neither confirmed nor denied the reports. In a September 26 meeting with Acting Pol/C, Gabriel "Gabby" Claudio, Arroyo's chief adviser on political affairs, commented that he was not certain, but said he did not believe that the President was actively considering a pardon. He added that he had asked Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita about the matter and he (Ermita) said he had not heard that there was any such move afoot. Claudio remarked that Romeo Jalosjos and the rest of his family were known to be very close to Norberto "Bert" Gonzales, the National Security Adviser. (Note: The Jalosjos' are members of a political party, "Partido Demokratikong Sosyalista ng Pilipinas," headed by Gonzales. End Note.) Claudio said he did not know whether Bert Gonzales was pressing the matter, but he said it as "very possible."

[1](#)5. (C) Further Background: As also touched on in ref b, Jalosjos was already a long-time politician when police arrested him in 1997. He received two life term sentences in 1998 and is currently serving his time at the national penitentiary located south of Manila. When arrested, Jalosjos was a popular representative from Zamboanga del

Norte. Despite his conviction and imprisonment, he won reelection to the House in both 1998 and 2001 (his seat remained vacant during those terms). The 65-year-old Jalosjos reportedly still wields considerable political power even from prison and his family remains very influential (aside from his brother and sister in Congress, another brother is the mayor of Dapitan, a large city in Zamboanga del Norte). In addition, Jalosjos, once a television producer and the owner of a luxury resort, enjoys strong support from many in the entertainment industry.

16. (C) Comment: The notion that the Palace might be contemplating a pardon tends to highlight President Arroyo's continued insecurity over her political position. Many observers have commented that Malacanang, weakened by recent scandals, may be entering into a "transactional" mode of governance wherein it is forced to cut deals with members of the House and Senate, and others in order to keep its head above water. Pardoning a convicted child rapist for transparent political reasons would be just about the worst form that such transactions could take. If a pardon is granted, it would also be a very bad message on the trafficking in persons (TIP) front where the Philippines has a very serious problem.

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